



WHERE ARE YOU GOING?



LIA DITTON, long-distance rower

Preparing to Cross the Pacific

As a kid, I was so introverted that I barely spoke. A teacher said I was like a turtle with my shell on my back—totally self-contained. In a way, that's still me; my rowboat is my home, my shell, and I'm vulnerable without it. Now I'm going to bring it across an ocean: In spring 2019, I plan to row from Japan to San Francisco. It'll take between four and six months to cross the 4,500 nautical miles, and I'm doing it alone.

At 21, I joined a crew in a yacht race—it was an adventure I couldn't pass up. I became a pro boat racer, then heard about a woman who sailed long distances on her own. In that moment, everything clicked.

After I sailed the Atlantic solo in 2005,

I found out that 17 solo attempts had been made to row west to east across the Pacific, and only two Frenchmen had been successful. I wondered why so many people had failed, and dared to consider trying it myself. If you think about the journey as a whole, it's almost stupefying. Small boat, big distance. The fear nearly did me in. But the reality is actually pretty mundane: You wake up, you row, you sleep, you wake up, you row.

My solar-powered desalinator makes seawater drinkable, and I'll eat mostly dry, nutrient-dense food: jerky, nuts, as much Parmesan as I can fit on board, and chocolate, for calories and morale. And I'll be taking about 150 audiobooks. Nothing highbrow. People

always think I'm going to learn Spanish or something, but actually, I prefer good bonkbusters—trashy novels with tons of sex scenes. I'll sleep in a narrow channel on the floor of the boat. Unsurprisingly, when I'm on the ocean, the thing I wish for most is a real bed with pillows. Oh my God, pillows!

Sometimes I have trouble integrating with the rest of society. Still, I've been bowled over by the support, messages, and crowdfunding I've received from strangers and friends (even those who fear they're helping me into a watery grave). I'm an island, like we all are. But by planning to cross an ocean alone, I've become more connected than ever to my fellow humans.

JULIAN WINSLOW